



Committee of Higher Education and Employment Advancement Public Hearing

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Testimony

by

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Good morning Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. My name is Kevin Corcoran, Associate Executive Director of the CTDLC, and I am here today to discuss **Raised Bill SB-288, An Act Requiring a Study of Information Technology Services to Public Institutions of Higher Education.**

The Board for State Academic Awards, comprised of Charter Oak State College and the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium, has some concerns about the Department of Information Technology's ability to understand the specific needs and challenges of the higher education community.

As you may recall, the CTDLC was created in 1998 out of the want and need of higher education institutions to collaborate around online learning. Since our inception, the CTDLC has been recognized as an innovative, collaborative, cost savings engine that supports the educational technology needs of many Connecticut institutions. Over the past 14 years, the CTDLC has been offering education and information technology services to the higher education community as well as the K12 and the State agency communities. While our primary focus has been online learning, the services we offer are utilized institution-wide. Our technology-based services are delivered via the Connecticut Education Network (CEN) and housed within the BSAA (CTDLC and Charter Oak State College) Data Center located in New Britain, CT.

As we have grown out of higher education, we understand the unique needs of those institutions and the demands of their students. With the adoption of online learning, education has become borderless in time and space. Our students and faculty come from all over the globe and access our services 24/7. They come to us with a variety of technologies and varying degrees of technical literacy. We have developed our services to support these unique learners and instructors.

Additionally, as institutions embrace the 21<sup>st</sup> century student, they must adapt and adopt newer technologies that can help mitigate remediation and increase retention while adhering to various regulatory mandates like the protection of student information through FERPA. Because of CTDLC's involvement in national educational initiatives, we have been able to act as an information hub for information regarding best practices, current trends, and issues that impact Connecticut's institutions. **When issues have arisen, CTDLC has worked collaboratively with Connecticut's higher education institutions to identify and address them.** A perfect illustration of this is in the way that Connecticut colleges and universities banded together to address student retention issues for online learners needing tutoring. CTDLC facilitated the discussion, coordinated the funding through granting opportunities, evaluated the existing technologies,



and eventually built an innovative and collaborative tutoring solution that is nationally utilized and importing revenues into the state.

Beyond the educational and technological services we have offered, CTDLC has been instrumental in negotiating state-wide agreements that often include volume discount pricing. In 2003, CTDLC negotiated a perpetual software license with WebCT (now Blackboard) for a learning management platform to cover the University of Connecticut system, Connecticut State University system, and the Connecticut Community College system. The software supports both online courses and provides a web presence for classroom-based courses. This collaborative purchase facilitated by the CTDLC **saved the state over \$200,000** at the point of purchase and continues to save money due to the perpetual nature of the software license. In 2009, CTDLC was able to negotiate a discounted renewal fee (from 10% to 5%) from Blackboard for the four public higher education institutions as well as additional private institutions utilizing CTDLC services. By reducing the renewal rate, CTDLC **saved the State of Connecticut over \$140,000** over the three year term.

Also in 2009, the CTDLC was able to liaison between the State's Attorney General and Apple Inc. to develop an agreement that would allow all Connecticut institutions to access the iTunes U media/education platform. While this agreement contained no dollar amount, the CTDLC collaborative efforts saved each constituent institution, including the Attorney General's Office, countless hours in staff time developing individual proposals.

In light of the unified public higher education Blackboard license, the existing K12 license supporting the CT Adult Virtual High School and CT Virtual Learning Center, and the growing state agency need for an accessible learning platform, CTDLC has engaged Blackboard in discussions to provide a full state-wide license that would include K-20 plus government agencies.

Blackboard is in the process of developing a pricing structure that would offer either a perpetual license agreement (that would allow for greater long term savings) or a discounted annual subscription license (which would reduce the current fiscal year's obligations) which would allow for a unified learning experience for all state constituents while saving the state millions of dollars over the long term. The license structure would allow for districts and agencies to opt in and provide tiered pricing (volume discounting) that would lower the per student cost as more programs utilized the platform. The State of New Mexico has reached a similar agreement with Blackboard and **reported over \$4 million in savings from this type of approach.**

The CTDLC does not charge a service fee for these negotiations. We engage in these discussions because we have long standing relationships with the many of the education-focused vendors; we understand the needs of the colleges and universities; and because it is the right thing to do.

Emerging technologies are like a new energy source. Fully unlocking the potential of these new technologies requires more than purchasing them; it requires creative re-thinking of basic processes. It requires innovation. Someone must look past the standard adoption or application of technology and invent a better solution.



The CTDLC was created to help serve as a thought innovator and help create this "new normal." As an idea incubator, our mission is to look past what is typically done and strive to find new and innovative solutions to problems. Our history shows that we have looked beyond the traditional, built bridges, and helped bring institutions and government agencies into a new future.

We would like to continue to provide this collaborative service delivery and purchasing role for the State; in fact, we would like to expand those efforts. As you plan how the state will adopt 21st century technologies, we hope that you consider the collaborative and service role the CTDLC can play between Connecticut's higher education constituents and the Department of Information Technology.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have.